



## The Hero's Journey



### What is a Hero?

It may be hard for you to make sense of the extreme experiences you've had. Sometimes it can help to think about how the events of your deployment fit into the world, and into history. This can help you feel less alone, and can help you find meaning in your experiences.

Not all service members feel like heroes. Some have been involved in things that they are ashamed of, or feel guilty about. Some think that they have let others down or failed at their duty. But before you decide that you aren't a hero, let's think about what that word means.



### What makes a hero?

- Answering the call to serve, in itself, is enough to make you a hero.
- Suffering and enduring the hardships and chaos of deployment makes you a hero.
- Being in situations where you had to make split second decisions in harsh circumstances where none of the options were attractive makes you a hero.
- Just being willing to take that risk and being willing to carry the burden of those decisions makes you a hero.

Of course, it's easy to decide that you don't deserve to be called a hero because your contribution was small or meaningless compared to others. But remember: most things are not black or white or all-or-none. This is true too of what it means to be a hero.





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### *The Hero's Journey*

For most of his life, a mythologist named Joseph Campbell studied the religions and myths of cultures from around the world. He discovered a pattern in the stories of these cultures that he called, *The Hero's Journey*. In the sacred legends of ancient peoples, in order for the hero to find meaning in his life and to understand his place in the world, this journey was necessary.<sup>1, 2</sup>



The “hero’s journey” is not all fun and games. In fact, part of the adventure of life is learning how to overcome challenges and accept the new people we become as we grow and change. Campbell’s illustration of *The Hero's Journey* may help explain this idea of “challenge and change.”

Finding this pattern in the sacred texts of cultures from all over the world and throughout history, Joseph Campbell saw *The Hero's Journey* as a powerful, **universal** description of what many people go through when faced with life-altering experiences such as war or other trauma.

### The stages of *The Hero's Journey*:

#### 1. Former Identity

At the beginning of *The Hero's Journey*, the hero has a certain identity based on life experience. This identity is made up of a religious or spiritual practice and/or an understanding of what is moral and ethical. And, the hero has an idea of who he wants to be in the world.

#### 2. Call to Adventure

At some point in the hero's life there is a “call to adventure”—there is a dragon to be slain, or an enemy that needs to be brought to justice. This call to adventure is about a moral battle, and about justice.



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### The stages of *The Hero's Journey*:

1. Former Identity
2. Call to Adventure
3. Initiation
4. Threshold of Adventure
5. Challenges, Tests, Losses, and Victories
6. Helpers, Friends, and Comrades-in-Arms
7. The Call Home
8. The Threshold of Return
9. Re-Initiation
10. New Identity

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*. New York: Penguin Compass, 1972.



## The Hero's Journey

### The stages of *The Hero's Journey* (cont.)

#### 3. Initiation

Often, before the adventure can begin, the hero must prepare for the challenges ahead by saying goodbye to loved ones, learning new skills, and traveling a great distance.

#### 4. Threshold of Adventure

Eventually, the hero crosses over from a familiar world into new and dangerous territory—it is common for the hero to feel disoriented, uncomfortable or downright shocked at how different this new life is from home.

#### 5. Challenges, Tests, Losses, and Victories

In this new world there are challenges and hardships that the hero never realized existed. While battling the dragon or searching for the sacred treasure, the hero experiences great losses (such as the death of a friend or the loss of a limb) and has great victories (the defeat of an enemy or the safe return of something valuable).

#### 6. Helpers, Friends, and Comrades-in-Arms

Throughout the adventure, the hero relies on others for support, protection and friendship.

#### 7. The Call Home

At some point during the journey, the hero must return home—the task has been completed, the deadline is up or the hero is needed elsewhere. The hero must then prepare to end the adventure, even if everything didn't go as well as he had hoped or the job is not finished.

#### 8. The Threshold of Return

Crossing over the “threshold of return,” the hero usually experiences long travel and preparations before he can be reunited with friends and family.



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### The stages of *The Hero's Journey* (cont.)

#### 9. Re-Initiation

The hero returns home to the loving arms of family, friends and community. However, a great deal has changed in the hero's life, including the way the hero now feels about his values, beliefs and the meaning of life.

#### 10. New Identity

The hero must re-create his life based on the new feelings and ideas brought up by the adventure. The hero's very identity has changed because of the challenges, victories and losses experienced while on *The Hero's Journey*. In order to remain strong for the community, the hero works hard to make sense of the new values he has found.



#### *The Hero's Journey: What Does it Mean to Me?*

After checking out *The Hero's Journey* illustration, you might ask, "What does this have to do with me and my life? How can old stories and religious legends help me deal with *my* problems?" The message of *The Hero's Journey* is this: no matter the hardships faced during a time of trauma or stress, ***you are not alone***. And, it is a normal, human experience ***to be changed forever by intense life events***. This has been true throughout history, in many different cultures.

Always remember:

- Heroes have problems too—***Nobody is perfect.***
- Even heroes have doubts—***It's okay to seek spiritual guidance.***
- Heroes don't have to "go it alone"—***It's heroic to rely on friends and community.***



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